

Code Talkers

Discussion Questions - We will discuss these questions as a group in class. Record your answers/thoughts for each question before and after each discussion and then hand them in. It is beneficial to make notes before the discussion so that you have something to contribute and then adding to those thoughts after the discussion demonstrates your engagement in the discussion and allows for further thought.

Section One: pp1-48

1. What role did language play for the Navajo children attending the mission schools? Give specific examples.
2. What challenges did their language pose? Give specific examples.
3. The following quote is from p8
“My parents and their parents before them had not gone to school to be taught by strangers. They had learned all they knew from our own relatives and from wise elders who know many things, people who lived with us. People just like us.”
 - a. What benefits do you think there is to being educated by people who are “just like us”?
 - b. Do you think there is a place for elders in today’s society and what could we learn from them?
 - c. Where do you think is the best place for us to acquire the knowledge necessary to navigate in the world today?

Section Two: pp50-104

1. Recall Ned’s thoughts as they approach the shore of the island (p101). He finds it strange to be experiencing so much rain being from such a dry climate.
 - a. What connects us to our home territories?
 - b. Is one’s identity shaped by one’s connection or experiences with their ancestral traditional territories (eg history, names, place names, climate, language, food, family lineage)?
2. Even though Ned and JonJon did not share the same language they were able to communicate.
 - a. What do you think connects Ned and JonJon?
 - b. In what ways does “knowing who you are and where you are from” enable Ned to survive as a Marine and while overseas?

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- c. Describe an experience of your own where you have needed to “know who you are” and compare it to Ned’s experience.

Section Three: pp105-145

1. How you deal with life’s challenges says a lot about the type of person you are. Despite the assimilation policy enforced upon them and the traumas experienced in the mission schools, many Navajo men enlisted as US Marines.
 - a. Why do you think Navajo men enlisted?
 - b. In your opinion, what does this response to previous trauma say about the Navajo Codetalkers?
2. Why do you think Ned joined the Marines and what do you think helped him make that choice?
3. Do you think he made the right choice? Do you think he thinks he made the right choice? Justify your answers.

Section Four: pp146 to the end

1. How did Ned’s previous experience allow him to have empathy for the Natives on the islands that the Japanese were attacking?
2. Do you think it is important for us to have empathy to the plights (problems and hardships) of others in life? Explain why or why not.
3. How can a lack of empathy cause problems in society? How can we resolve this?

Section Five: post-reading

1. What are your thoughts on the length of time between the end of the war and the official recognition of Navajo code talkers by the American government? (Was this an appropriate length of time? Were they justified in their keeping in secret? Explain your answer.)